

IRAN CAPTIVE

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I draw the Senate's attention to a troubling situation abroad. By now, many following the news have heard of the name Youcef Nadarkhani. Pastor Youcef is a Christian in Iran who has been sentenced to death for refusing to deny his faith. He was originally arrested in October 2009 while attempting to register his church. He allegedly questioned the Muslim monopoly on the religious instruction of children in the state.

To Iran, his crime is his Christian faith and evangelism, and the punishment is death. For as many problems as we face in America, we are blessed that this is not one of them. The American Center for Law and Justice and other national groups have been diligently working on the case since it was first reported earlier this year. At any moment, Pastor Youcef could be executed without notice to his family or the public. I would like to take this time to add my name to the list of those calling for his immediate, unconditional release.

This past weekend, Iran began to claim that Pastor Youcef's crimes were not of religion but of rape and threats to national security. These new allegations appear to be a new and unfounded attempt to justify his execution. None of these crimes were mentioned in his trial over the past 2 years.

While "religious freedom" may be the law of the land in Iran, it is certainly not the practice. This audience is well aware of the persecution of religious minorities and Christians abroad. We should not forget the plight of religious minorities throughout this region, especially the Coptic Christians in Egypt, Chaldo-Assyrian Christians in Iraq, the dwindling Christian population in the Holy Land, and other religious minorities in the Middle East.

I believe we can and we must do more to advance religious freedom abroad. Earlier this year, in coordination with Congressman FRANK WOLF in the House and my Senate colleague, Mr. LEVIN, I introduced the Near East and South Central Asia Religious Freedom Act. The bill creates a Special Envoy on religious freedom in the State Department to monitor the status of religious minorities in these particularly vulnerable regions. I am sincerely committed to this effort and believe that it is essential to promoting the God-given right to liberty around the world. I am hopeful that the Senate can soon join the House in passing this important legislation.

I ask that other Members of the Senate join me in this call to save Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani's life and condemn Iran's denial of the universal right to religious freedom.

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF THE WASHINGTON PARISH FAIR

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, located on the eastern edge of Louisiana,

Washington Parish plays a central role in celebrating our State's unique culture and history. Every October, residents and leaders of the parish host the annual Washington Parish Fair, which marks its 100th anniversary this month.

This quiet but remarkable parish is known for its agriculture, its scenic rivers, and its thriving workforce, which spans across a number of industries, including paper and timber production. Once the center of the dairy industry, the area boasts a relatively low unemployment rate, with nearly 75 percent of its workforce belonging to the community's private sector.

The parish is also known for its genuine hospitality. Its residents volunteer tirelessly for the annual Washington Parish Fair, which is believed to be the largest fair of its kind in the country. The 5-day event, which began in 1911, now attracts families from all over the State. They spend the weekend enjoying the wide range of activities the fair has to offer—including a livestock show, a rodeo and carnival rides—while taking in the unique Louisiana scenery.

This popular event is a model of the community spirit and a prime example of the cultural and economic advancement that can be achieved when neighbors work together for a common goal. Every year, Washington Parish leaders and residents commit themselves to the success of the event, and I commend them for their efforts to continue such a first-rate Louisiana tradition.

CHILDHOOD OBESITY AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. President, as September ended, so did Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. While it is important to set aside a month for special attention to this epidemic, we must not forget that childhood obesity is a year-round battle.

The facts about childhood obesity are startling. Obesity rates have more than tripled in the last 30 years. In Ohio, more than 30 percent of children and adolescents are overweight or obese. Our children living with obesity experience lifelong health problems, including type 2 diabetes, heart problems, and bone and joint problems.

Combating childhood obesity might seem like an uphill battle, but with national attention on the issue, we can meet this urgent need. And communities across Ohio and the Nation are doing their part. Public and private partnerships are joining forces to unite in the fight against childhood obesity.

We see it with the U.S. Surgeon General's healthy youth for a healthy future initiative promoting healthy eating and physical activity to the Do Right! Campaign in communities in greater Cincinnati. We see it with Let's Move! events throughout the State, and collaborations between Federal and State governments and local communities, organizations, and individuals.

Last year, the Senate passed landmark child nutrition legislation, the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act, to help promote health and reduce childhood obesity. This bill will improve the nutritional quality of school meals through an increase in Federal reimbursement for school lunches. It also establishes national nutrition standards for all foods sold in schools so that vending machine food and snacks in the a la carte line are healthy and nutritious. The Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act will connect more children to healthy, locally grown produce through farm-to-school programs with the dual benefit of making sure children know how their food is grown and supporting Ohio farmers.

Also worth noting is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's, USDA, progress in updating the nutrition standards for school meals so they are in line with current nutrition science. I commend the USDA for its efforts and urge it to finalize these new school lunch rules quickly so that children across the country get the benefit of more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products.

I am also proud of the proactive efforts of Ohio hospitals in acknowledging their ability to combat the epidemic of childhood obesity.

The Cleveland Clinic's 5 to Go! Program is a comprehensive childhood wellness program. A partnership with family health centers, hospitals, schools, and neighborhood partners, 5 to Go! is working in Cuyahoga County to keep children healthy by encouraging them to get 1 hour of exercise a day and consume more fruits and vegetables in their meals.

University Hospitals Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital is a national leader in addressing childhood diabetes—one of the more serious side effects of obesity. Through funding awarded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Rainbow is home to the Center of Excellence for Childhood Diabetes, Activity, and Nutrition. Rainbow is holding workshops to educate school nurses on childhood diabetes and hosting events with patients and their family focusing on breakthroughs in treatment and disease management.

By teaming up with the Kohl's Community Youth Fitness Program, Akron Children's Hospital is teaching 8 to 13-year-olds about healthy fitness and eating habits through participation in activities and games.

In Toledo, ProMedica is focusing its attention on community-based nutrition programs. The Fields of Green Program includes everything from hydroponic and community gardens tended to by neighborhood children to a scholarship program for high school students. And, through a partnership with the YMCA and the United Way, the Summer Feeding Program has increased the number of meals served to children under 18 from 1,500 to over 45,000 in only 1 year.